Published: Dec. 25, 2013, *Kokomo Tribune* [Page: A4]

http://www.kokomotribune.com/opinion/article_ec66fba7-7f4b-541e-8472-a3f3891194c9.html

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Rob Burgess, Tribune night editor

House of Burgess: Best of 2013 awards

Also, a thank-you for reading this year

By Rob Burgess
Tribune columnist

Since I did the same thing last December, I feel justified in calling this, my final column of 2013, the second annual Best of the Year awards. (If you ask me, there is no such thing as a “first annual” anything.)

If you read something I wrote this year, including this: thank you. Earlier this month, I officially became an award-winning journalist when I won first place for Best General Commentary in the 2013 Hoosier State Press Association Foundation Better Newspaper Contest. I couldn’t be prouder,

but I also know I couldn’t have done it without my readers. Consider this my Christmas present to you.

Best supporting actor: James Franco

I haven’t gotten close to catching up on all the late-season, award-bait prestige movies I need to this year, but when I saw James Franco’s turn as Alien in Harmony Korine’s latest picture, “Spring Breakers,” I knew I had seen the best performance of 2013.

“My real name is Al, but truth be told, I’m not from this planet,” Alien tells the four main characters. “Some people? They wanna do the right thing? I like doing the wrong thing!” And indeed, this rapping, Floridian drugs and weapons dealer is a complete extraterrestrial.

“I got ‘Scarface.’ On repeat,” he tells the girls as he shows off his mansion. “‘SCARFACE’ ON REPEAT. Constant, y’all!”

Franco says he was inspired by rapper Dangeruss. Meanwhile, another rapper named Riff Raff claims he was the basis. Whatever the truth, I will have forgotten even my own name before I shake the memory the sound of Alien’s thick drawl intoning: “Spraaaang Breaaaak. Spraaaang Breaaaak, forevaaaah.”

Best justification for 3-D movies: ‘Gravity’

I love film, but I sure have hated watching 3-D movies in my lifetime. In my experience, it's usually a tacked-on feature that forces attendees to pay higher prices. Oftentimes, the screen is far too dark. And sometimes, long stretches will be in 2-D, only to be punctuated by a 3-D action sequence, leaving the audience to wear the bulky glasses for much of the movie for no reason.

I had my perspective shifted last year when I saw "Life of Pi" in 3-D and realized it could be beautiful if created with the format in mind. When I saw "Gravity" in 3-D this year, I was completely sold. The awesome, deadly loneliness of space was perfectly captured. I feel sorry for anyone who missed it in theaters and will only get to see it in 2-D.

Best final TV season: 'Breaking Bad'

Being caught up on AMC's "Breaking Bad" during its final eight episodes in August and September was thrilling. Usually, television shows either sputter to a stop or it's the crunching of metal as they careen off the tracks. In Season Five, Part II, "Breaking Bad" managed the rare trick of ratcheting up the excitement every single time until gracefully bowing out.

Other television shows may have better final episodes, but you would be hard-pressed to show me another program's final season that was as fun, fresh and wildly unexpected as this was. Yeah, Mr. White! Yeah, science!

Best rap album: 'One For The Road'

Leave it to Devin the Dude, now more than 20 years deep in the game, to drop the best rap album of the year, “One For The Road.”

Laid back party jams “Herb the Nation” (which samples Yazoo’s “Situation”) and “Hope We Don’t Get Too Drunk” (featuring fellow Odd Squad veterans Rob Quest and Jugg Mugg) are fun, old-school Devin. “Fresh Air,” “Stop Waitin’” and “Reach For It” are downright inspirational. Better luck next time, everyone else.

Best newly discovered novel: ‘The Things They Carried’

When I finally picked up Tim O’Brien’s 1990 semi-autobiographical Vietnam War novel, “The Things They Carried,” what I found was not only one of the best war novels I had encountered, but one of the best novels ever, period. O’Brien is one of those authors who, when I read them, just make me want to either give up completely or write three times as much as I already do.

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